

Emergent social identities in a flood: implications for community psychosocial resilience

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ABSTRACT

While the mobilisation of pre-existing networks is crucial in psychosocial resilience in disasters, shared identities can also emerge in the absence of such previous bonds, due to survivors sharing a sense of “common fate”. Common fate seems to operate in “sudden-impact” disasters (e.g., bombings), but to our knowledge no research has explored social identity processes in “rising-tide” incidents. We interviewed an opportunity sample of 17 residents of York, UK, who were involved in the 2015-16 floods. Using thematic and discourse analysis we investigated residents’ experiences of the floods, and the strategic function that invocations of community identities perform. We show how shared community identities emerged (e.g., due to shared problems, shared goals, perceptions of vulnerability, and collapse of previous group boundaries), and show how they acted as the basis of social support (both given and expected). The findings serve to further develop the social identity model of collective psychosocial resilience in “rising-tide” disasters. Implications for policy and practice are discussed.

Keywords: community resilience; social identity; flood; common fate; disaster; emergency

Emergent Social Identities in a Flood: Implications for Community Psychosocial Resilience

Disasters can affect communities both materially and psychologically, and can be divided into “sudden impact” and “rising-tide” events (Ingleby, 2014). Sudden impact events (e.g., bombings, earthquakes) are relatively sudden, unexpected, and unpredictable, while rising-tide events (e.g., floods) are usually predictable, allowing more time for the coordination of an arranged response. With regards to floods, UK authorities focus on improving the *collective resilience* of communities (Cabinet Office, 2011). Most of the government’s guidance on community resilience focuses on pre-existing social bonds and networks within communities, which are activated in the face of adversity, and can mobilize support, prevent trauma, and assist in recovery (e.g., Cabinet Office, 2011). However, pre-existing relations are not always necessary for supportive behaviour in disasters (Drury, 2012). Decades of disaster research have shown that an emergent sociality, involving mutual aid among survivors, often arises in the face of adversity, over and above pre-existing bonds (e.g., Fritz & Williams, 1957; Kaniasty & Norris, 1999; Solnit, 2009). Social psychological research on sudden-impact extreme events (e.g., Drury, Cocking, & Reicher, 2009; Drury, Novelli, & Stott, 2015; Drury, Brown, González, & Miranda, 2016) suggests that this sociality reflects an emergent social identity based on the experience of “common fate”.

In this paper, we present an exploratory interview study with residents of the recently flood-affected area of York, UK, in which we sought to examine whether identity processes that have been shown to operate in “sudden impact” disasters also operate on “rising tide” incidents: that is, whether shared identities did emerge based on a shared experience, and whether the provision and expectations of support operated through a shared social identity.

Floods and the UK Context

In the UK, flooding poses one of the major national risks, both in terms of impact and likelihood (Cabinet Office, 2015); more than five million people in 2.4 million properties are at risk from river, sea, surface or groundwater flooding (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2013), and climate change makes it likely that more houses face a risk of flooding in the future (Committee on Climate Change, 2012). Floods can be reoccurring and repeatedly affect the same population; their effects can persist for a long time after the waters have receded (Stanke et al., 2012). Moreover, they can have long-term impacts due to primary and secondary stressors (Stanke, Murray, Amlôt, Nurse, & Williams, 2012). Primary stressors are directly related to the disaster itself, and have been defined as “inherent in particular major incidents, disasters and emergencies, and arising directly from those events” (Department of Health, 2009, p. 20), while secondary stressors are described as “following from and are consequential on what has taken place” (Department of Health, 2009, p. 20).

To defend against the effects of floods, a strategy employed by the UK government is building the resilience of communities. Community resilience has been defined as “Communities and individuals harnessing local resources and expertise to help themselves in an emergency, in a way that complements the response of the emergency services” (Cabinet Office, 2011, p. 4). Social psychology provides suggestions on the processes by which people come to see themselves and act as community members during disasters by drawing upon the concept of social identity.

Shared Social Identities and Social Support in Disasters

The emergence of collective behaviour in emergencies and disasters has been explained through the social identity model of collective psychosocial resilience (SIMCR; Drury et al., 2009; Drury, 2012; Williams & Drury, 2009). Collective psychosocial resilience refers to the ways that people collectively organise, mobilise resources, and provide and expect solidarity and cohesion to overcome an emergency or a disaster, based on their shared social identity

(Drury, 2012; Williams & Drury, 2009). The SIMCR seeks to explain features of collective behaviour observed in the literature on disasters by applying the principles of self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). A threat can create a sense of common fate, which acts as comparative context and influences the emergence of a shared social identity among survivors. In turn, shared social identity motivates people to give support to others in the group (cf. Levine, Prosser, Evans, & Reicher, 2005), to expect support from fellow in-group members, and enables them to coordinate their actions for the achievement of common goals. This analysis is in line with the “social cure” approach, which has highlighted the beneficial effects that group belonging can have on well-being (Jetten, Haslam, & Haslam, 2012).

Evidence for this process comes from research on extreme, sudden impact events. A shared group membership was evident among survivors interviewed after the London bombings on July 7th, 2005. This seemed to arise due to common fate and was argued to have facilitated social support between them (Drury et al., 2009). Similarly, in the Chile earthquake and tsunami in 2010 (Drury et al., 2016), a survey found that common fate due to the widespread impact of the disaster predicted shared social identity with other people affected by the event. In turn, shared social identity predicted survivors providing each other with emotional support and with expectations of support, which itself predicted participating in providing coordinated support. Further, identification with the crowd during a near-disastrous outdoor music event enhanced feelings of safety and expectations of support among party-goers (Drury, Novelli, & Stott, 2015). In line with this model, majority and minority groups felt as if they were part of a common group after an Italian earthquake in 2012 (Vezzali, Cadamuro, Versari, Giovannini, & Trifiletti, 2015).

To our knowledge, the SIMCR has not yet been applied to investigate group processes in rising-tide extreme events like floods. The term “community resilience” is usually applied

to existing communities (Cabinet Office, 2011), with less attention given to “communities of circumstance” or the processes through which these emergent communities operate during floods. Also, research has largely focused on the emergence of shared identities during the acute phase of disasters, leaving possible social identity processes in the aftermath of disasters and their impact in alleviating the effects of secondary stressors largely unexplored. Therefore, we used an incident of large-scale floods in the UK as a case study to investigate the processes through which residents came to identify as community members, and the ways that the provision and expectations of support might operate through such identifications.

Background: The December 2015 York Floods

York was hit by Storm Eva on 24 December 2015. The Environment Agency issued warnings from 23 December. On 26 December, the water almost entered the control room of the River Foss barrier. The Environment Agency was forced to lift the barrier to lower the water height and avoid damage to the electrical equipment, which could, otherwise, have resulted in loss of control. That action resulted in flooding the surrounding area. A multi-agency response to protect public health and minimise the damage was initiated involving North Yorkshire Police, the City of York Council (CYC), the Environment Agency, Fire and Rescue teams, and Yorkshire Water (City of York Council, 2016). The community and volunteer response was prompt; over 250 members of the public and 25 other volunteer groups helped to fill sandbags, clean the affected areas, prepare food, and pack and distribute supplies. Around 350 houses and 157 businesses in 34 of York’s streets were confirmed as internally flooded, the travellers’ community in St James Street was also affected, and 250 people were evacuated. Disruptions were reported in networks of communication, roads and power, and there were reports of multiple burglaries at evacuated properties (BBC, 2015). York was represented in public and media discourses as a case of strong “community spirit” during and

after the floods (York Press, 2016), which made it an ideal case study to investigate possible social identity processes.

METHODS

Interviews

We carried out 16 interviews with 17 York residents (two participants were interviewed as a pair) almost two months after the floods. Participants were an opportunity sample, interviewed on the basis of their willingness to share their flood experiences. Some residents expressed their interest to be interviewed during residents' meetings, while others were recruited through "snowballing".

The interview questions were partly exploratory, but also theoretically-driven since we were interested in the role of emergent social identities in group processes during the floods. Participants were asked about community relations (e.g., *"how would you describe the community after the floods"*), vulnerability (*"did you feel in control of things"*), common fate (*"did it feel like people shared the same fate"*), shared identity (*"did you feel a sense of unity with them"*), behaviour (*"how did you react"*, *"did people organise collectively"*), received and expected support (*"did you receive support"*, *"do you think that if you need support, you will have it"*).

Our sample was divided between flood-affected residents, non-affected residents, and indirectly affected residents – see Table 1. Four interviewees' homes were flooded (water in their houses or businesses), five were indirectly affected (e.g., through neighbourhood disruption, problems with internet/telephone, transport, resources), and eight were not affected. We interviewed non-affected people to investigate whether similar identity processes also operate in absence of flood damage. Six participants were male and 11 were female. The age of the 13 participants who were willing to declare it ranged between 24 and 69 years ($M = 45.3$, $SD = 12.66$). All participants were over 18 years old. Participants were unemployed, charity

workers, civil servants, self-employed, students, or unable to work. The interviews were fully transcribed; their mean duration was 35.4 minutes (total = 9 hours 46 minutes).

Analytic Procedure

We employed thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and techniques from discursive psychology (Potter, 1996; Potter & Wetherell, 1987) to the material. First, we re-read the data, created codes where extracts of similar content were assigned (e.g., references to community identity, provision of social support), and organised them into distinct and coherent themes. Our analysis was guided by theoretically-driven questions (e.g., was there reference to shared identity), but unexpected themes were also identified (e.g., different ways of talking about antecedence of that shared identity). In line with previous work (Drury et al., 2009), we consider references to sense of community, togetherness, and unity, as indicators of shared identities. Through discursive psychology, we investigated the strategic functions that invocations of the emergent sense of community played in the construction of group boundaries and in justifying perceptions and actions that occurred during the floods.

ANALYSIS

We start this section by presenting extracts that show how people understood shared identities emerged in absence of pre-existing relations. Table 1 provides an overall picture of these two themes combined by presenting each participant's flood status, feelings and observations of a shared community identity, and their observations and provision of social support¹.

[Insert table 1 here]

¹ Participants are identified through the letter P, their number, and the subsequent letters F (for flooded); N (for non-flooded); I (for indirectly affected).

Emergence of Shared Identities

The first extract is typical of accounts of a sense of unity and cohesiveness arising during adverse events:

P10F: I would imagine that mentality of everybody coming together in that time of crisis, I just felt I wasn't alone, and it was really nice.

P10F refers to a specific way of thinking ("*that* mentality") which arises during times of hardship ("time of crisis") and uses an extreme-case formulation ("everybody") to give emphasis to a widespread feelings of togetherness. The shared way of thinking is attributed to primary stressors, which in this case is the event ("crisis") itself. The crisis is seen by the participant as causing the convergence of people and the broadening of group boundaries, and also brings up a sense of commonality, diminishes negative feelings of loneliness and individuality ("I just felt I wasn't alone"), and creates a positive experience ("it was really nice").

Similarly, we see how a non-affected resident came to identify with the affected residents and offer her support:

I: So maybe you felt this sense that this sense that people who had been affected were more like yourself? People who happened to have the disaster strike them?

P16N: Yeah exactly, it's not fair, they have been treated to a way that I didn't, it's some of the consequences, it's not anything other than chance really so, and yeah so I did feel like I may as well do something.

The extract starts with the interviewer asking this non-affected participant whether she identified with the affected residents. The interviewee provides a positive response and proceeds to justify her position. The situation that flooded people have found themselves in is constructed as an injustice ("it's not fair"), and the use of passive voice constructs the flooded residents as victims rather than agents of their situation, to which the interviewee expresses her

personal concern (“they have *been treated* to a way that *I didn’t*”). People’s grievances are again constructed not in terms of personal responsibility, but as a matter of “chance”; anyone could have been in their position, which is used to explain offers of support. Thus, irrespective of flood status, the sense of a potential common fate and perception of others as victims led the participant to identify with the affected and offer support.

An unexpected finding was that, for some participants, the community spirit emerged because the floods hit a previously unaffected area, the residents of which were perceived as vulnerable rather than prepared:

P6N: we’re all used to this happening and everybody who is along here gets prepared, they’re prepared, but this is what shouldn’t have happened, and this is where the idea for the community spirit for the floods, yeah that’s where we came in, I mean these people are organised, so we don’t bother about them ((laughs)), because they know what they’re doing, but this, when this happened, and it happened for the first time since the 1980s.

Some areas of York flood several times a year, but the community is not mobilised in support of the affected. P6N, who was unaffected, mentions that awareness and preparation in the regularly flooded areas is in place, which makes those residents being perceived as prepared (“these people are organised”, “they know what they’re doing, “we don’t bother about them”). Non-affected residents’ lack of concern for the regularly flood-affected is formulated under an inclusive “we”, which makes the lack of response appear as a normative community response. However, the location that was affected in the winter of 2015-16 was not a regularly flooded one, and the residents were less prepared to deal with the emergency. Thus, as P6N mentions, the community spirit emerged because the floods in the recently affected area were outside of the everyday (“*this* is what shouldn’t have happened”), which made them perceive those affected as unprepared, vulnerable, and in need of support (“this is where the idea for the

community spirit for the floods, yeah that's where we came in"). The response and emergent community spirit are formulated through an inclusive "we" and as representing the community, which is used to explain the mobilised support towards the residents of the vulnerable, unprepared area.

Other participants explained how the shared impact of extreme events resulted in existing group boundaries being dissolved, leading to development of unity and mutual support:

P5N: The thing [the community spirit], I think it's been amazing, I kind of related it to, I don't know if you know the story of the selfish giant, he builds a wall around him, doesn't he, and he kind of keeps himself in and he's a bit angry with things, and I think sometimes communities can get a bit like that, we tend to build these barriers up, it doesn't matter where you live or who you are or if you've got money or if you've not got money, everybody just came together, there not those walls there, and I just really feel that the community spirit had died, [but] it's [still] there.

P5N discusses how individualism was dissolved and the re-appearance of an inclusive sense of community through the metaphor of the 'selfish giant'. The character in that story surrounds himself with walls that separate him from the rest of the community; there is a lack of communication and negative attitudes to others. Similarly, people within communities are constructed as setting up boundaries between them during everyday life, preventing a sense of community from coming into existence. Script formulations are used to represent the everyday individualism as typical ("communities can get a bit like that") and as representing the whole community ("we tend to build these barriers up"). The participant then uses breach formulations (Edwards, 1994) to describe how individualistic routines are disrupted during an emergency: group boundaries seem to dissolve ("they're not those walls there"), people are united ("everybody just came together"), and previous group boundaries like one's identity or income are not relevant anymore, which is attributed to the event itself ("but because this [the

flood] has happened”). P5N presents his positive feelings towards the community spirit that re-appeared (“it’s been amazing”), and emphasises its persistence and broad inclusiveness of residents, regardless of differences in class and status.

For some residents, it wasn’t the event itself but common problems (in this case burglaries of evacuated houses) following the immediate impact of the event that facilitated a sense of commonality between residents:

P12I: People came in and looted, that wasn’t just the travellers that it happened to, it also happened

I: It also happened to other houses as well, to the settled community for instance?

P12I: Yeah, so actually that makes you feel a little better because “woop, something that happened to us also happened to you” you don’t usually do that, you know what I mean, we’re very separate.

P12I was a “settled” resident closely associated and working with the York traveller community, which was heavily affected by the flood. She had previously referred to the lack of contact and discrimination that travellers face from the settled York community. First the participant identifies the problem (“people looted”) and then identifies the groups that suffered from those behaviours, which are both the traveller and the settled community. The common targeting seems to generate positive feelings (“you feel a little better”), which is justified through the common problems that those two distant communities faced (“something that happened to us also happened to you”). Thus, previous identities of location (e.g., settled vs travellers) were not salient anymore, but common fate and shared grievances between the majority and minority groups were seen as enough to make them identify as a common group.

According to some other residents, the sense of ‘groupness’ came into existence because residents shared similar goals for dealing with common problems:

I: So, this lack of coordination also leads people to take action, collective action, to change things?

P3F: I think it will, the Facebook group has been described as a movement, and I think that's not far away [inaudible] I think it's containing people you know from every end of the political spectrum, and none, people of all classes, ages, demographics, faiths, beliefs, none, whatever, ahm, it contains all those people, and everybody's had and it's not that we have a common enemy, it's that we've had a common cause, yeah, we've worked for something, not against something, that is my feeling there are times when you feel wrecked and those are the self-destroying moments, unfortunately you are working against that infrastructure that was supposed to be in place.

The participant had earlier referred to problems stemming from the actions and inactivity of the authorities and the council, and had also mentioned that the Facebook group assisted with the overall coordination between residents in asking for and providing support. P3F defines the group not as a simple platform for coordination, but as the online embodiment of the community. It is constructed as broad and inclusive, with its members not being distinguished from various previous identities ("classes, ages, demographics, faiths, beliefs"), but from their shared goals and willingness to collectively engage and deal with the flood damage ("we've had a common cause"). Individual grievances seem to become collective ones identifying others in a similar situation, and the Facebook group itself became a platform that embodied this shared identity to deal with the floods. Thus, identifying others with common grievances appears as leading to the emergence of groupness, while at the same time groupness (e.g., coordinating through social media) can empower and create further shared goals between its members.

From Shared Identity to Social Support

Interviewees gave examples of social support, as well as people's expectations of future support:

P11I: A lot of people have asked me to ask questions for them and I've got to the council, I've asked them about the money, I've asked them about the book problems, I've had landlords approaching me asking me if I can help them out, you know, type of people that wouldn't normally stop me in the street and say hello, you know [E: yeah] and yeah it's been, it's been er it's been a great experience.

P11I was very active during the post-flood phase and was asked for practical support by other people. Before the flood, the situation between the interviewee and those requesting support is described as one of distance and separation ("people that wouldn't normally stop me in the street"), but there seems to be a transformation after the floods. Some people were in need of support and others were willing to offer support and help cope with the common experience of the floods. Thus, there seems to be a context where previous interpersonal and group boundaries have collapsed, and the norms of the salient community identity are those of offering support to fellow community members in need, which facilitated communication and offers of practical support, regardless of previous experiences.

There were also instances of emotional support reported in the interviewees' accounts. Residents around the affected area organised meetings in which problems could be addressed and dealt with collectively. A flooded resident stated that:

P11I: I feel after having been to the residents meeting, I feel a lot better, I feel good in a sense that I've been heard as well, I spoke to [MP] and, to actually have an MP who I felt listened and cared, I think that's the whole thing, about being heard and cared about.

The residents' meetings generated positive feelings ("I feel a lot better") and were empowering for the attendants, since they felt that their voice was heard by a group that was created due to similar interests and goals. Moreover, the presence of people with a certain political status (e.g., an MP) that were accepted by residents to the meetings and seemed to share similar goals with the group seemed to further enhance participants' positive feelings. Residents' meetings were also described as a place where residents could provide emotional support to each other:

P11I: I think there's been a real sensitivity if somebody looks sad then there's been a hand on the shoulder, it's that sort of non-verbally type thing, but for me, when I was talking about the residents meeting and I just, tears just came in my eyes and a lady came and she was like "right ok, where can I point you in a direction, here's a number for blah blah blah," and she was there and I have no idea, I mean obviously I know her name now but I had no idea who she was and she was there offering support.

In this account, residents coming together in a group of similar interests and goals facilitated the provision of emotional support between attendees. This is evident in P11I's statement that, in general, there is "a hand on the shoulder" for whoever might need support. This statement is supported from a personal example in which emotional support seems to have been provided between attendees with no previous affiliations.

There were also instances of members of the community expecting support in the case of future extreme events. P10F was asked about the support she would expect in case of a future emergency:

P10F: yeah I think so yeah it's not like I expect, it's like I think, for me it feels like human nature, because you know each other more, I couldn't ask for any more, people were amazing coming as I said from all over the UK, but the community spirit here has been phenomenal, and then people, if I don't know say, I didn't even know certain

people who lived on the estate, people pointed us to the direction of each other, so it's been really, really nice on that level.

Here, P10F uses a script formulation ("human nature") to attribute feelings of expected support to generic innate qualities rather than personal beliefs ("it's not that I expect"). The expected support in a future emergency is justified through the better connections and networks between residents that were established after the floods ("because you know each other more"). Support was described as arriving from many places ("from all over the UK"), and the community is invoked to describe a sense of collectivity and broadened group boundaries ("the community spirit here has been phenomenal"), which led the participant to get to know people with which she had no previous contact ("I didn't even know certain people"). Thus, the previously observed support and the new connections created overall make up the participant's explanation for her perceptions of expected support in a future emergency. Similarly, P1N explains how expected support operates:

P1N: cause I had this discussion earlier, just having that implicit trust in, you know, in your fellows, you don't know, but based on previous experiences and what you see, you can expect help, and that in itself it is for me anyway a great physical and emotional comfort.

This interviewee constructs expected support as the "implicit trust" in networks to deliver support during emergencies. It appears to be linked to previous experiences and observing support, with positive experiences (e.g., people coming together and offering support to flood survivors) and observed events (e.g., observing people helping each other) enhancing later expectations of support and proving to be beneficial both practically and emotionally.

However, some participants referred in their interviews to supportive networks and group-helping behaviours which, when absent, reduced expectations of support:

P8I: All of a sudden all the flooded community had gone and of course we were the next ones in line so, all of a sudden, we didn't have any neighbours, it was just us and there was nobody you know, initially there was nobody there and it was like "who do we talk to" and you know so it was quite isolating, cause the people we were meeting were people who had just come down for a look in the end, ehm you know, they were just out of curiosity, they weren't sort of directly affected, and it was like suddenly we had lost that support network because if our house floods, there's nobody in distance now cause they've already left.

P8I lived in a flood-affected neighbourhood, saw the water rising near her house, but in the end suffered no damage. P8I offers a vivid description of the events which emphasises the lack of supportive networks. The lack of immediate neighbours with whom to communicate gave rise to negative feelings such as isolation and lacking supportive networks. The feelings of loneliness did not disappear when people visited the flooded area, since the participant did not perceive them as similarly affected ("they weren't sort of directly affected") or as coming to their aid ("they were just out of curiosity"), since passers-by were not described as sharing mutual situation or goals with the participant, resulting in not being constructed as possible networks of support.

DISCUSSION

In this paper, we investigated the processes through which a shared identity emerged during a 'rising-tide' disaster, and whether different types of social support operated through social identity processes. Previous work has focused on social identity processes on directly affected people during the acute phase of emergencies (e.g., Drury et al., 2009; Drury et al., 2015), and a novel aspect of our paper is to show how shared identities operate in the aftermath of disasters. In our case, there is some evidence that the non-affected community mobilized in

support of the affected after the waters had receded, which is crucial in mitigating the impact of secondary stressors and in assisting with the long-term recovery.

Our analysis is in line with the SIMCR (Drury, 2012) and suggests that, similarly to ‘sudden impact’ events (e.g., Drury et al., 2009; Drury et al., 2015), new shared identities can also arise in ‘rising tide’ incidents over and above any pre-existing bonds. For example, residents explicitly mentioned feeling a sense of unity, received, and gave support to people they did not know before. The emergent sense of togetherness was sometimes evident through participants’ reference to ‘we’, reflecting novel extended group boundaries within the geographical community.

There was evidence that people identified with others in terms of a shared community identity, based on common fate. The present analysis therefore extends findings on the emergence of identities by shedding light on the processes through which indirectly and non-affected residents come to share a sense of social identity with the affected. It suggests that identification with affected people arose through: directly experiencing the flood; through secondary stressors (e.g., looting or problems with the authorities); shared goals for dealing with common problems; common fate itself; and sometimes because of a *potential* common fate. Putting oneself in the shoes of people who were affected, imagining the possibility of being in a similar situation, or perceiving the affected as vulnerable victims mobilised support from unaffected residents

Shared identities are crucial for the provision of social support (e.g., Drury et al., 2015; Vezzali et al., 2015). We noted that residents praised the community spirit, and said they were eager to provide practical and emotional support, while also having heightened expectations of future support. In terms of practical support, indirectly affected residents mentioned sharing resources among themselves, and they also received emotional support from other residents. Non-affected residents stated that they helped distribute resources, gathered donations, and

shared information. Interviewees said that emotional support was offered either directly, or came through indirect empowerment during resident meetings, and we can perhaps assume that the longer the sense of community is sustained through community flood groups, the longer people will feel that their voice is heard. Residents also felt more confident about the future, since the support they observed being offered increased expectations of future support and facilitated a sense of empowerment. These expectations of future support were shared by both affected and non-affected residents, and are again in line with the predictions made by the SIMCR. We also found that most participants who observed and felt part of the community spirit had also observed and provided various types of social support (see Table 1). All types of support are important for the recovery of the affected community through the mitigation of the impact that secondary stressors can have. However, the loss of supportive close networks, accompanied by the perception of unrelated people as ‘others’ rather than as fellow community members, and of their behaviours as not oriented to group-helping, can limit broadening of group boundaries and the emergence of shared identities, leading to perception of oneself as lacking and not expecting support, increasing perceptions of vulnerability.

Shared identities in the context of flooding were not simply a function of context, but were also strategically invoked to bring that collectivity into being and define its boundaries in certain ways, often through the use of a collective ‘we’. Group boundaries can be broadened to be more inclusive and achieve mobilisation, or they can be redefined as narrower, excluding people as in-group members and reducing the chances of people receiving support (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Reicher, Cassidy, Wolpert, Hopkins, & Levine, 2006). To sustain groups and their identities over time, broad and inclusive rhetoric should be used that constructs the community in collective rather than individualistic terms. Thus, if community resilience can only be achieved through the cooperation of communities and authorities, it is important that authorities and emergency responders are perceived as parts of the community, rather than as

outgroup members. Some participants stated that unity came when they were trying to deal with situations caused by what they saw as the lack of coordination and preparedness of the authorities. While not taking such accounts uncritically or necessarily representative of the population, a distinction between residents and authorities might exist that can prevent a broader sense of unity and cooperation and negatively affect the resilience of the community. Thus, if cohesion is sought, it is also the responsibility of the authorities to build communities' trust in their policies and actions.

Our research has certain limitations. It comprised conducting and analyzing a cross-sectional series of exploratory interviews, so our findings are far from conclusive. We focus on some participants' accounts, and other interviews could have different or even contradicting experiences. Also, the lack of previous acquaintances between the first author and members of the York community proved to be a difficulty in recruiting participants. Thus, it is possible that our participants were more community-oriented because we constructed our sample through snowballing. However, the use of opportunistic sampling based on people's willingness to share their experiences, and the introduction to the first author through previous connections proved to be useful, since it offered access to residents who might otherwise have been difficult to reach. Also, introduction through former participants made the interviewer appear as a trusted source, encouraging participants to be open in their responses (Sheu, Wei, Chen, Yu, & Tang, 2009). Another limitation of our study is that we were not able to investigate whether the social support given during and after the floods was received by flooded residents on the basis of a shared identity. Indeed, social psychological research in line with the social identity tradition has shown that people are more likely to accept social support when they share a social identity with its providers (e.g. Levine et al., 2005; Haslam, O'Brien, Jetten, Vormedal, & Penna, 2005; Haslam, Jetten, O'Brien, & Jacobs (2004). However, the conditions under which this study was carried out, and subsequently the nature of our sample did not allow us to

investigate whether social support was indeed received on the basis of a shared social identity. Most of our sample comprises of non-affected and indirectly affected residents, with only four having experienced flooding directly. This is because the interviews were carried out soon after the floods, when most residents had already moved to other properties due to their residences being uninhabitable. Thus, their identification and participation in the study was not possible at that specific time.

We suggest the following work is needed if we want to avoid the limitations of this exploratory study and be able to generalize our findings. First, more interview studies and focus groups with those affected by other floods can provide evidence for transferability and verify that the themes emerging in our analysis are common. Second, more interviews with only flooded residents are required to shed light onto how displacement affects the sense of togetherness, and how offers of support from non-affected residents are accepted on the basis of a shared social identity. Third, quantitative surveys in a larger population are necessary to investigate the complex relationship between emergent identities, their antecedents, their psychosocial effects, and to infer issues of causality.

Finally, we would like to avoid giving the impression that resilience is some sort of panacea. First, our analysis addresses only the psychosocial/group aspects, while “community resilience” also comprises many other factors such as economic and other resources (Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, & Pfefferbaum, 2008). Second, community resilience is inextricably linked to socio-political policies, meaning that austerity-based budget cuts can directly affect the availability of economic resources. Some interviewees linked the flood with dissatisfaction and unhappiness with government policies. Moreover, the definition of “community resilience” itself refers to the processes by which communities help themselves and complement the work of the emergency services. Thus, there is a possibility that the strategy of enhancing community resilience could be perceived by flood-affected residents as

resulting from the authorities' inability to provide adequate support, placing the responsibility of preparedness and response on communities themselves.

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Table 1

Participant demographics, shared identity, and supportive behaviours

Shared community identity	Supportive behaviours
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	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Flood status</u>	<u>Observed</u>	<u>Felt part of</u>	<u>Observed</u>	<u>Carried out</u>
P1	M	34	Not flooded	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P2	F	44	Flooded	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	F	45	Indirectly affected	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P3							
P4	F	62	Not flooded	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
P5	M	60	Not flooded	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P6	F	-	Not flooded	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
P7	M	30	Not flooded	Yes	-	Yes	Yes
	F	-	Indirectly affected	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P8							
P9	F	69	Not flooded	Yes	No	No	No
P10	F	46	Flooded	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	M	44	Indirectly affected	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P11							
	F	53	Indirectly affected	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P12							
	F	45	Indirectly affected	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P13							
P14	F	24	Not flooded	Yes	-	Yes	No
P15	M	-	Flooded	Yes	-	Yes	No
P16	F	33	Not flooded	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P17	M	-	Flooded	Yes	-	Yes	Yes